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The good oil on Womad

WHEN Shell New Zealand announced its ongoing sponsorship of Taranaki's successful Womad festival of music, arts and dance, it presented guests with a timely reminder of the value of the oil and gas industry to the region.

Last year the industry generated \$1.61 billion in output, added about \$733 million to Taranaki's gross domestic product, and employed almost 800 fulltime workers. And it is further estimated that indirectly — if suppliers and sub-contractors are factored in — the number of fulltime employees is more like 3000, and the contribution to the Taranaki GDP \$1.41 billion.

That was last year. This year the energy industry is even busier in Taranaki, with two new offshore fields being simultaneously developed, three other offshore fields busy producing their oil and gas, eight onshore fields producing as well, and exploration work continuing unabated all around the region — this weekend's visit to Port Taranaki of a big jack-up drilling rig being an excellent illustration of that.

So it goes without saying that energy is massively important to the Taranaki economy. In fact, it can be said that while the rest of New Zealand is exposed to the slings and arrows of fluctuations to the global economy, thanks to the white gold of milk and the black gold of oil, this region

is protected from all of that.

Not only that, but Taranaki can be thankful for the level of financial support members of the energy industry give to all sorts of local projects by way of sponsorships. The 'upstream' companies such as Shell, Todd, Origin and AWE, and the 'downstream' operators such as Methanex, have all poured thousands of dollars into everything from local schools to the region's rescue helicopter trust.

At Friday's Womad event, Shell NZ provided a good insight into why the energy industry considers it important that it should invest in such sponsorship. It's not purely for philanthropic reasons — it's also so Taranaki, particularly New Plymouth, can be a desirable place.

As Shell's country chairman for New Zealand, Rob Jager, pointed out, his company feels it's important that it helps build a community that its employees will want to live and work in, one that meets Shell's skill requirements, and encourages creativity and new ideas.

That's important, because as the global energy industry increases its efforts to find and develop more sources of oil and gas, there is a worldwide shortage of skilled professionals. The challenge for New Zealand — particularly Taranaki — is to attract and retain its necessary share of these workers. The ongoing success of events such as Womad is critical to this.